

United States Senate

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The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
Department of Agriculture  
212A Whitten Building  
1400 Independence Ave., SW

December 10, 2009

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

I write to you regarding the distribution of direct payments to dairy farmers, as provided for by the fiscal year 2010 Department of Agriculture Appropriations Act. I urge you to finalize plans to distribute these payments promptly, so that our nation's dairy farmers may receive much needed financial relief prior to December 25, 2009.

I worked with Senators Sanders, Gillibrand, Casey and a number of my Senate colleagues on an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Act that provides \$290 million in direct payments to dairy producers. This amendment was crafted to provide the Department of Agriculture with maximum flexibility in determining how best to allocate these funds. I understand the task given to you is a complicated one, replete with political sensitivities and harsh economic realities, and I commend you on the many actions your Department has taken to date to assist dairy farmers.

The approximately 7,600 dairy farms in my state of Pennsylvania support over 55,000 non-farm jobs in the hauling, distribution and processing industries. The loss of a dairy farm has repercussions far beyond the individual farm and impacts entire communities. With an unemployment rate of 8.8%, my state cannot accept the loss of more dairy farms. I know that you need not be reminded of the urgency of this situation, but I must nevertheless ask that you ensure the distribution of these direct milk payments to dairy farmers prior to December 25, 2009.

I am encouraged by the recent increase in milk prices, and I understand that your Department is projecting higher prices into the future. It is my hope these direct payments will assist my state's farmers in surviving long enough to witness them.

My best.

Sincerely,



Arlen Specter

*Not a day passes without  
my hearing about the  
dairy farmer's sad plight.  
These funds should get out  
ASAP. Thanks!*